

IMPORTANT REMINDERS ABOUT ASBESTOS

Even a very small amount of asbestos, which is present in many building materials, can cause cancer and other health problems. As a result, schools have important obligations to protect their employees, their students, the public, and the environment from asbestos.

As an employer, a school is required to provide an asbestos awareness course at least once a year to an employee who performs housekeeping operations in an area that contains, or is presumed to contain, asbestos. The asbestos awareness training must be provided at no cost to the employee, and it must cover certain required elements. More details can be found at 29 Code of Federal Regulations 1910.1001(j)(7)(iv).

Since asbestos is dangerous only when it is disturbed, remodeling and demolition projects demand special attention. In many cases, a proper survey and laboratory tests must be conducted prior to work beginning. If asbestos is present, it must be properly removed or encapsulated by qualified and trained people. In many cases, units of government are prohibited from accepting bids from contractors that do not hold a permit for asbestos removal. Regulation of asbestos construction projects in Iowa falls into three main categories.

Occupational health. The Occupational Safety and Health Bureau of the Iowa Division of Labor Services enforces OSHA standards designed to protect employees from asbestos in the workplace. Both employers and building owners have obligations to protect workers. The Iowa Division of Labor has a separate Consultation and Education Bureau that provides training and other OSHA assistance at no cost. Visit <http://www.iowaworkforce.org/labor/index.html> or call 515-242-5870 for more information about OSHA.

Clean Air. The Air Quality Bureau of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources enforces standards designed to protect the environment and the public from asbestos. Visit <http://www.iowadnr.gov/InsideDNR/RegulatoryAir/Asbestos.aspx> or call 515-281-7212 for more information. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) which requires that a qualified “designated person” is on site for each school district and requires a three-year re-inspection and six-month periodic surveillance for all schools. For more information on AHERA call 913-551-7093.

Licensing and permitting. Handling asbestos is not a job for amateurs. Businesses planning to engage in asbestos removal must first obtain a permit from the Iowa Division of Labor Services. Iowa Code Section 88B.11 prevents governmental entities from using contractors that lack an asbestos permit. Individuals planning to work in the asbestos industry must first obtain a license from the Iowa Division of Labor Services. Visit <http://www.iowaworkforce.org/labor/asbestos.htm> or call 515-281-5666 for more information.